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SUBJECT: NINTH ANNUAL TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT SUBMISSION FOR  
ALBANIA

REF: 08 STATE 132759

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

(SBU) Below is Post's submission for the 2008 Trafficking in Persons  
Report. Responses are keyed to reftel request.

THE COUNTRY'S TIP SITUATION  
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1A. In 2008 both the Government of Albania and civil society actors  
made significant strides in gathering, maintaining and analyzing  
data on trafficking in persons. Both of these databases on  
identification of victims are considered reliable.

The GOA has one dedicated database, maintained by the Ministry of  
Interior, with contributions from three different ministries all  
four NGO shelters, and the National Reception Center for the Victims  
of Human Trafficking (Linza). Collectively, the above mentioned  
entities make up what is known as Albania's National Referral  
Mechanism (NRM). The NRM was established to promote a victims  
centered approach, to ensure consistency in definitions of terms  
relating to trafficking and coordination among signatory  
organizations as well as to establish a consolidated data base.

Made operational in 2008, the database records all victims of  
trafficking who have been identified by GOA NRM participants in  
Albania during the year, regardless of whether the victim has  
denounced his trafficker. This is a major improvement over the  
GOA's identification process in previous years. This database has  
identified 108 victims during the reporting period, a five-fold  
increase in identification by the GOA over last year. Of these 108  
victims, 60 were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 2 were  
trafficked for forced begging and the remaining 46 were either male  
victims or foreigners identified by the GOA.

The civil society database inputs data from all four NGO shelters  
for victims of trafficking and contains information on all victims  
of trafficking who have been referred to the shelters for social  
services, regardless of referring agency. The civil society  
database does not include information from the government-run  
shelter, Linza, as it has elected not to participate in the civil

society database. The civil society database identified 98 victims during the reporting period.

Neither database captures reliable information on child trafficking for forced labor. A Swiss NGO, Terre des Hommes, maintains an independent database to track child trafficking figures. This year it reported that it identified 96 new cases of Albanian child trafficking, mostly victims identified in Greece. The recently established Child Protection Units within local municipalities have increased efforts to identify suspected child victims of trafficking, but this number is not yet reported to a central database. The overall scope of the problem of trafficking is difficult to determine, partly due to lack of coordinated and reliable data. Terre des Hommes is not a signatory to Albania's NRM and has consistently declined to join. As a result, their data has not been included in the GOA data base.

¶B. Albania is a country of origin for sex trafficking, trafficking of children for forced begging, and labor trafficking. Greece is the main destination country, but victims are also exploited in Italy, Macedonia, Kosovo, Spain, France, and the UK.

Internal trafficking is a problem and is acknowledged by the government. Information on internal trafficking is incomplete because law enforcement officials often classify these cases as exploitation for prostitution rather than trafficking. Even so, in most circumstances internal trafficking victims are referred to social services at the government run Linza shelter.

¶C. Victims were coerced physically and/or psychologically to cross borders to final destinations in private houses, brothels, or hotels. Victims are most often recruited by someone they know, such as a relative, and are mainly transported by vehicle or on foot. Women are coerced to work as prostitutes, while children are sent to work primarily as beggars.

¶D. Based on an extensive data analysis made possible by the government and civil society databases, there is a slight change in the understanding of who is most vulnerable to trafficking. For sex trafficking, the profile of a typical victim continues to be women between the ages of 15 - 25, with moderate education levels, from families with social problems. However the data show that residents of regions which have moderate levels of economic development are most at risk, not the poorest regions. Additionally, in sex trafficking 90% of the identified victims come from the main ethnic "Albanian" groups. In child trafficking, the profile of vulnerability changes; Roma and Egyptian children are most at risk, due to their extreme poverty.

¶E. Typically, traffickers/exploiters are known or related to the victim. Traffickers are usually independent and otherwise unemployed. The influence of organized crime in trafficking has declined in recent years and criminal groups, when involved, generally performed a coordinating role. Children were often trafficked by their families and/or sold while women most often were trafficked by persons known to them who offered false promises of marriage or other false romantic relationships. Only 17% of the cases reported in 2008 were recruited through promises of false employment. In most cases, parents or guardians are aware of the exploitation. Post has no information to indicate that employment, travel, tourism agencies or marriage brokers are involved with trafficking efforts.

#### SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-TIP EFFORTS

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¶A. Yes, the government acknowledges trafficking is a problem in the country. During the reporting period, both the Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) and the Prime Minister have become more supportive in acknowledging the issue of human trafficking. At the initiative of the ONAC, Albania has adapted further legislation to comply with international TIP standards. However, implementation of this legislation by other Ministries remains problematic. In general, a lack of cooperation from other Ministries, particularly the Ministries of Labor and Justice, to implement anti-trafficking efforts hampers the efforts of the ONAC in addressing TIP issues. Occasional resistance also still occurs at the regional or municipal government level.

¶B. The Ministry of Interior is the lead agency on anti-trafficking issues, with a National Coordinator for Anti-Trafficking who is one of two Deputy Ministers. The Deputy Minister has a staff of five. Other agencies involved in anti-trafficking efforts include: the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs; Foreign Affairs; Justice; Culture and Tourism; Education; Health; the General Prosecutor's Office; and the Office of the Prime Minister.

¶C. A developing democracy, Albania has limited resources to tackle a wide variety of pressing issues. Funding and training for police and customs officers, government social workers, and diplomats is inadequate. With the exception of the border police during 2008, high turnover for the civil service in all ministries and levels remains a serious barrier to ensuring that police officers, border officials and social workers are competent and well-trained. Furthermore, some government agencies tasked to address TIP have not taken responsibility for implementing their TIP role. Certain government officials and offices continue to be unsupportive towards anti-trafficking efforts because they are either unaware of their responsibilities or are uninterested. The government lacks the resources, and at times it seems the will, to aid and protect victims. The majority of the work done to protect victims of trafficking is implemented through local NGOs and IOs. Corruption is widespread and endemic at all levels and all sectors of Albanian society, and this is a major barrier to reducing human trafficking.

¶D. The government monitors its anti-trafficking efforts through the Office of the National Coordinator. This office is a clearinghouse of information on all anti-trafficking efforts, with special responsibility for victim protection and prevention. The Office of the National Coordinator publishes annual public reports on the state of human trafficking each year. The GOA also published in December 2008 its National Action Plan which outlines the efforts the government is taking. The National Coordinator's office continued to participate in and publicly support the anti-trafficking activities of NGOs and international donors during the reporting period, although some organizations reported at times strained communications with this office and other agencies tasked with combating human trafficking.

#### INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKERS

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¶A. Seven articles in the Criminal Code apply to trafficking in persons:

- Article 110(a) prohibits trafficking in persons for the purposes of prostitution, forced labor, organ trafficking, or other forms of exploitation; prohibits organizing, managing, or financing trafficking in human beings; adds additional penalties for committing the offense repeatedly or engaging in serious mistreatment or injury to the victim; adds additional penalties where the victim dies and where the perpetrator is a government official;
- Article 114 prohibits inducing or gaining from prostitution;
- Article 114(a) prohibits aggravated exploitation of prostitution, such as employing minors, employing multiple prostitutes, and using deception, coercion, or accomplices;
- Article 114(b) contains five paragraphs that directly parallel Article 110/a, but apply only to trafficking in women;
- Article 128(b) contains five paragraphs that directly parallel Articles 110/a and 114/b, but apply only to trafficking in children.
- Article 124 (b) criminalizes the physical and psychological ill-treatment of minors by the person who is obliged to care for him/her, including prohibiting child labor, begging, or providing income; and
- Article 298 prohibits assistance for the sheltering, accompanying or transporting of persons illegally across the Albanian border or for the illegal entry of a person into another state.

In 2007, Parliament amended the Criminal Code regarding child protection to fight internal trafficking. These changes include amendments to Article 117 regarding the use of minors for pornography; Article 124 (b) for ill-treatment of minors; and Article 128 (b) for the sale of minors.

Articles 110 (a), 114 (b), 124 (b), and 128 (b), as described above,

prohibit labor trafficking, with the same penalty for all types of trafficking.

In January 2008, Article 124 (b) was passed, which criminalizes forced begging of children by their parents or other persons who have custody of them.

In February 2007, Article 298 was amended to criminalize the assistance of illegal border crossing for profit and the providing of means or assistance for illegal border crossing, as well as criminalizing assisting the illegal entry of someone into another country. The amendment to the law is expected to make it easier to prosecute those who assist individuals who illegally enter other countries but have lawfully crossed the Albanian border.

1B. A 2004 law provides for civil asset forfeiture for those convicted of trafficking and requires that defendants must explain the source of their own or family's wealth. The Serious Crimes Prosecution Office implements the civil asset forfeiture laws that allow for the freezing and confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The administration of the seized and confiscated assets is the responsibility of the Agency for Administration of Sequestered and Confiscated Assets (AASCA) within the Ministry of Finance. During 2008, AASCA made some significant structural and functional improvements regarding administration of assets, but to date no assets have been liquidated and distributed to victims or used for other governmental purposes.

The penalty for trafficking in persons is five to 15 years in prison; for trafficking in women the penalty is seven to 15 years; for trafficking of minors it is seven to 15 years. Aggravating circumstances, such as kidnapping or death, can increase the sentence to a maximum of life. Fines for these offenses are as follows: trafficking in persons, two to five million leke (\$24,000 to \$60,000); trafficking in women: three to six million leke (\$36,000 to \$72,000); trafficking in minors: four million to six million leke (\$48,000 to \$72,000). A convicted government official or public servant faces a 25 percent increase in penalty.

1C. The penalties for labor trafficking are the same as for sex trafficking, and labor trafficking cases are prosecuted under the same articles.

1D. The Criminal Code imposes penalties of three to ten years imprisonment for the rape of an adult woman; two to seven years imprisonment for adult homosexual rape; five to 15 years imprisonment for the rape of an adolescent age 14 - 18, and seven to 15 years imprisonment for the rape of a child under the age 14. These penalties are generally lighter than those for trafficking.

1E. Since 2004, the Serious Crimes Court and Serious Crimes Prosecution Office have been tasked to handle TIP and organized crime cases. The office includes a team of prosecutors and police who have exclusive jurisdiction over these cases. In calendar year 2008, the government prosecuted 13 cases of trafficking in women (Article 114 b), and 6 cases of trafficking in minors (Article 128 b), however, three of these cases were eventually determined to not be related to trafficking. The Prosecutor General's office reports the following convictions in 2008: trafficking in persons (110 a) 0 convictions; exploitation of prostitution with aggravating circumstances (114 a) 15 convictions; trafficking in women (114 b) 5 convictions; trafficking in minors (128 b) 6 convictions.

As noted above, the government also prosecutes labor traffickers, and some of these cases may be included in the figures above, but government statistics are not broken down in this manner.

1F. The government is responsible for providing training to police officers and state social workers on the identification and treatment of victims and possible victims of trafficking. Albania's police academy curriculum, revamped in 2007 through funding from the USG's ICITAP program and PAMECA, includes six hours of training on anti-trafficking out of the 22-week basic course for new officers. Current police officers attend a basic 11-week in-service course which includes four hours of training on trafficking in persons. Both trainings include discussions of the main elements of transnational crime, the phases of the trafficking process, applicable articles of the Criminal Code, methods of securing

evidence, and procedures for dealing with victims, but do not focus on the police's responsibility in implementing the NRM.

Throughout 2008, the ONAC has intensified its efforts in providing training for officials working on anti-trafficking. Comprehensive training has been provided to law enforcement officers and social service providers. For example, the School of Magistrates in October organized a training session with judges and prosecutors entitled

"Compensation of Trafficking Victims." Twenty judges and prosecutors participated in this GOA-OSCE organized course. The School of Magistrates is also planning to organize five more similar sessions for judges and prosecutors through June 2009.

In addition, approximately 20 female Anti-Trafficking Police Officers have been assigned to Anti-Trafficking Units in the Organized Crime Regional State Offices. This number represents a two-fold increase in the female anti-trafficking cadre compared to one year ago. Spot checks have indicated the presence of these officers at Kapshtica (Greek/Albanian border) and to a lesser extent, the international airport Rinas. In practice, most female officers are still on call to report to crossing points.

In order to supplement basic police training on anti-trafficking during 2008, approximately 100 Anti-Trafficking Police, Border and Migration Police and Community Police Officers received specialized training on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and its victim identification interview instruction. Training lesson plans, presentation materials and tests were developed under the advice and guidance of ICITAP and taught by a female Albanian State Police (ASP) officer. The course included basic identification techniques for potential victims of trafficking contained within Albania's NRM.

A portion of this training included provisions related to the sensitive handling of victims. These trainings occurred in April, May, June, and July. Participants tested (under the advice and guidance of ICITAP) for retention of basic course material.

1G. The GOA does cooperate with other governments in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases. However, both Post and the GOA have noted a significant problem in receiving responses from letters which request assistance from foreign governments. In 2008, the General Prosecutors office reported sending eight such requests to various foreign governments, only three of which have been answered. Foreign countries which have not cooperated with Albania in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases are Greece, Italy, France and the UK. For example, one such request, in the form of a Letter Rogatory, was sent to the UK in June 2007 and remains unanswered, despite eight follow up inquiries in 2008 by the Albanian Minister of Interior, Albanian Ministry of Justice, U.S. Embassy in Tirana, U.S. Embassy in London, UK Embassy in Tirana and IOM. Examples such as these make prosecutions of TIP cases even more difficult and send a message to the GOA that some Tier One countries do not treat TIP with a high priority.

1H. According to the GOA, Albania has bilateral extradition treaties with Macedonia, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Turkey, and the United States. Albania honors these agreements with each by extraditing its own citizens, unless the subject may face the death penalty. Albania is party to the European Convention on Extradition.

In 2008, Albania received six requests for extradition for trafficking related offenses; all were approved in addition to another request from a previous year. Persons charged with trafficking in other countries may be extradited. There is no prohibition on the extradition of Albanian nationals, and they can be extradited for trafficking or other offenses.

1I. In 2008 there was no official evidence to indicate direct government involvement or tolerance in trafficking in persons. However, two cases in which the Supreme Court overturned convictions of traffickers have raised questions as to the Court's commitment in upholding the law in general. Post does not feel that these cases demonstrate a particular leniency toward traffickers, but rather reflect the pervasive corruption that plagues all sectors of society and make prosecuting any crime very difficult.



J. Not applicable.

K. Prostitution is illegal in Albania, and punishment ranges from a fine to a three-year prison sentence. Brothel owners, pimps, and enforcers may also face criminal charges for exploitation of prostitution, and if convicted, are fined or imprisoned for up to five years. The penalty increases to seven to 15 years for aggravated circumstances such as kidnapping or assault.

L. Albania currently has approximately 344 troops serving abroad in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and other locations. No Albanian soldiers have been investigated, prosecuted, or convicted of facilitating any form of trafficking.

M. To date, sex tourism has not yet been identified as a major concern in Albania. However, both civil society and the Government of Albania have been pro-active in instituting measures to prevent the phenomenon from occurring on an organized level in Albania. For example, the Ministry of Interior / Office of the National Anti-trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) has undertaken several projects to prevent child sex tourism including: signing a cooperative agreement with 24 tourism operators entitled "On the Promotion and Implementation of the Code of Conduct for prevention of the sexual exploitation of children in tourism" which will be monitored by the Ministry of Tourism; the ONAC has produced and distributed a television spot on combating child sex tourism which was broadcast on all major TV networks; and with the help of the OSCE and Council of Europe most border crossing points have been equipped with billboards containing an anti-trafficking message.

During the reporting period, the Swiss NGO Terre des Hommes raised a suspicion that street children may be involved in forced prostitution. During the preliminary investigation it appears that the sexual exploitation of children may be happening in isolated occurrences. At the request of Post, this information was given to the Albanian police, which began a formal investigation into the possibility of an organized system of sexual exploitation of street children. No evidence has been found to date to support this suspicion. In July 2008, a 20 year old Montenegrin citizen was charged under Article 100 of the Penal Code for "Sexual or homosexual intercourse with Minors". The charge was brought forward by the young woman's father and is still under investigation.

In 2006 at the "His Children" orphanage in Tirana, three British citizens, one of whom was the administrator of the center, were charged with sexually abusing minors. In 2008 the administrator of the center was convicted under article 100 of the Penal Code, "Sexual or homosexual intercourse with minors", and sentenced to serve 20 years in prison. The two other British citizens were extradited from Great Britain. Their trial process is still ongoing. Also on October 14, an American citizen was charged under Article 300/1 of the Albanian Penal Code for "Failure to Report a Crime." These charges concern whether the personnel of the clinic that conducted the initial medical examinations of the children failed to report the evidence of sexual abuse to the proper authorities. The American citizen is the titular director of the medical clinic involved. The first hearing on this case is scheduled for February 24, 2009.

#### PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

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A. Once a person has been identified as a Victim of Trafficking (or presumed victim), the person is informed of the social services available to victims of trafficking and is offered protection regardless of whether he/she chooses to cooperate with law enforcement officials or not. Victims are not obligated to accept any of the assistance options offered by the identifying body.

However, in terms of longer term victim protection there are some gaps in existing practice. Albania does have a witness protection law (Law No. 9205, dated 15.03.2004 "On the Protection of Witnesses and Collaborators of Justice"), but protection for witnesses can only be requested by the General Prosecutor's office and it has only done so once in a TIP case from 2004. In 2008, for example, the General Prosecutor's Office did not request witness protection for any victims of trafficking.

The government's ability to fund protection and assistance services offered by the shelters is severely limited. However, it operates one victim care facility, NVRC, in the capital city of Tirana, as noted above.

Fear of retribution from traffickers and their associates remains the main reason that victims refuse to testify, as those who do can be vulnerable from the time they make their statement until a trial begins. There is also often a need for protection after a trial is completed.

USAID project "Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking". These shelters include the Hearth (Vatra) in Vlora, Another Vision (Tjeter Vision) in Elbasan, Life and Hope Community Center (Qendra Komunitare Jete dhe Shprese) in Gjirokaster, and Different and Equal (Te Ndryshem dhe Barabardhe) in Tirana. From these shelters, victims have access to a range of services for support and reintegration including: medical care, psychological and counseling services, and education and job training, either on site, through the government or through private clinics and centers. There is one licensed government run shelter for victims of trafficking, the Linza National Reception Center in Tirana. The shelter houses both victims of trafficking and irregular foreign migrants identified within the Albanian territory. The GOA provided approximately \$262,000 in funding to Linza during 2008 an increase of 16 per cent over the previous year. Three of the five shelters offer free, voluntary HIV/AIDS testing.

The Government of Albania provided no funding to the four NGO shelters during the reporting period. However, the GOA provides sporadic in-kind assistance to the NGO-managed shelters, such as the use of government buildings and land, access to health care, vocational training programs, and other in-kind assistance. The National Coordinator and the experts of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities are working on amending law no. 9355, date 10.03.2005 "On the social assistance and social services." These changes and additions will create a clear allocation scheme of how the government will provide funding for those NGO-run shelters that provide assistance to victims of trafficking.

There are no specialized care facilities specifically for child victims; however Another Vision does have separate residential facilities for child victims of trafficking. Other residential facilities for children accept children at risk or suspected victims on an ad hoc basis. The majority of these facilities are run by non-governmental organizations.

1D. Yes, the government assists foreign trafficking victims in the same way that it helps domestic victims while also providing temporary and/or permanent residency status. Care and services are provided at the government-run shelter for women and children, the National Victims' Referral Center (NVRC) in Tirana. In 2008, a law was passed entitled "On Foreigners" that provides a basis for granting temporary and/or permanent residency status. The government also has in place legislation and procedures for asylum seekers, and in principle, victims of trafficking could apply for asylum.

1E. The Government does not provide longer term shelter or other resources for the reintegration of victims of trafficking.

1F. Throughout 2008, the GOA initiated National Referral Mechanism (NRM) meetings on an ad hoc basis which brought together government, civil society, and international observers to improve the functioning of the referral mechanism. One of the key topics of these meetings was the establishment of a government-managed database to manage and track cases of victims that were identified and referred by all parties during the year.

The four NGO shelters report that police rarely refer victims to them, preferring the government run Linza National Reception Center shelter. The Linza shelter has refused to share its data on victims of trafficking with the NGOs, and accordingly the NGO database does not include all GOA figures. Instead, the Linza Shelter under the NRM Agreement provides data to the ONAC.

Starting in the winter of 2008, the GOA began to officially

recognize victims of trafficking as persons who meet Palermo Protocol criteria regardless of whether or not they provide a statement to authorities denouncing their trafficker.

¶G. The government, with information from NGOs, identified 108 victims of trafficking for calendar year 2008, a significant increase from the previous year. Of these, 17 were children, 77 were women, 12 were men and two were Roma. Identified victims who want social assistance are referred to one of the five shelters and transported to the shelter by the shelter's vehicles.

¶H. Under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), law enforcement, immigration, and social services officials have received training in identifying trafficking victims. However, in practice, law enforcement officials have a more sophisticated understanding of the identification process than their colleagues in other ministries. Prostitution is not legal in Albania.

¶I. The rights of victims are generally respected; victims are not detained, jailed, deported, fined, or criminalized.

¶J. The government encourages victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. However, victims often refuse to testify or change their testimony as a result of intimidation by traffickers. The GOA has a Witness Protection Program, noted separately, which does work effectively to protect victims of organized crime, but it has only been used once for a trafficking victim since 2004. In 2008, according to the government, 24 victims assisted in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. Albanian law allows for civil lawsuits and there is no official impediment to a victim's filing such a suit. However, victims generally do not initiate civil suits due to mistrust of the police and judiciary and the length of time required to complete a civil procedure. If a victim is a material witness to a case against a former employer, the victim is permitted to obtain other employment or leave the country pending trial.

¶K. See above. In June 2008, in cooperation with IOM and the Albanian Diplomatic Academy, the MFA conducted a training session with seven consuls from Albanian missions abroad in Italy, Greece, and Great Britain, Germany, Canada, the United States, and Belgium. In 2008, the Albanian Consulate in Rome, in cooperation with IOM, assisted one female minor victim of trafficking with her documentation and paperwork.

¶L. See above B and C under Protection and Assistance to Victims.

¶M. The most active international organizations and/or NGOs who work with trafficking victims are the USAID-funded shelters listed in 26.B. Other key anti-trafficking actors are the International Organization for Migration, the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, the Swiss NGO "Terre des Hommes", (funded by USAID), International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), UNICEF, and CIES (an Italian NGO). Cooperation with local authorities in implementing anti-trafficking efforts improved in 2008.

#### PREVENT (###)

trafficking. For example, the government has increased funding for institutions that provide vocational training and gives additional (###) breaks to businesses which employ people deemed lost at risk for trafficking.

In cooperation with IOs, the government has conducted informative sessions with more than 50,000 students warning them of the dangers of trafficking. The GOA also believes that the liberalization of visas with the EU will contribute to a decrease in external trafficking. To that end, the GOA has opened a dialogue with the EU on this topic.

The majority of prevention campaigns are conducted by international organizations, with cooperation from the Anti-trafficking Unit. For example, on National Anti-trafficking Day, October 18, the National Coordinator and the Anti-trafficking unit organized a public event under the motto: Trafficking is a road with no return. Say no to trafficking. The event was widely broadcast on TV networks. A spot featuring the message of the Anti-Trafficking National Coordinator on child sex tourism was broadcasted by the major TV



networks in the country.

The national toll free no. 0 800 1212 is open and running, and its spot is continuously broadcasted.

With the help of the OSCE and Council of Europe, most border crossing points display stands and billboards that show anti-trafficking messages and the government has a campaign at border checkpoints highlighting criminality of sexual relations with minors.

1B. Albania has a "National Register of Foreigners;" the Register is an official electronic document that holds detailed information on foreigners that have entered Albania. The Register contains information on:

- Time of entry in the country;
- Duration of stay;
- Movements of the foreign in the country
- Employment.

Despite the fact that there is no official register on Albanian migrants, the GOA does maintain limited data on different types of Albanian field migrants. Based on the conclusions of these studies, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunity (MoLSAEO) is working on sensitizing the public on the importance of regular migration.

The GOA is working on facilitating the process of migration for Albanian citizens, especially for those who want to study or work abroad. On December 2nd, the MoLSAEO signed a cooperation agreement with Italy regarding employment of Albanian migrants in Italy. In 2009, the GOA expects to finalize a cooperation agreement with the Greek government.

1C. Yes, Albania has a State Committee on Anti-trafficking which sets out the anti-trafficking policies, a National Coordinator for Anti-trafficking, and a coordinating structure - the Anti-trafficking Unit. The National Coordinator's Office works in partnership with local organizations and international partners to operate the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the government's primary mechanism of coordination among stakeholders. The NRM provides a structure for police officers (including border, and anti-trafficking police), social workers employed by the Ministry of Labor, and NGOs who have signed on to the mechanism to work as a team to identify and refer victims. The goal of the NRM is to improve identification and referral processes. Established in 2005, the NRM has been inconsistently and inadequately implemented. By early 2008, however, coordination and communication between the NRM's partners had improved and the NRM was functioning more smoothly.

The National Coordinator's Office manages the Regional Committees which are regional coordinating bodies that began in the summer of 2006 and continued to meet during the reporting period. These working groups are comprised of local police, local anti-trafficking units, the women's shelters, and other local NGOs to oversee the NRM and to coordinate anti-trafficking initiatives in the field in education, social services, police activity, employment, and public awareness campaigns. Local actors have stated that the committees do not always include civil society members, and when cases are presented, the committee members have taken a slow and reactive response. Most outside sources have commented that regional committee members seem uncertain of their role and thus are inefficient at dealing with cases brought to their attention.

Coordination between local police entities and local NGOs improved by the end of the reporting period with the help of interaction from the Minister of Interior, Director General of Police, and the National Coordinator for Anti-trafficking.

1D. Yes, in 2008 the government approved a new National Strategy and action plan on combating trafficking in persons, including a national strategy and action plan for the fight against child trafficking and the protection of child victims of trafficking. The National Coordinator and the Anti-trafficking Unit managed a very long and extensive strategy drafting process. Throughout the drafting process, the Anti-Trafficking Unit organized and managed more than 25 meetings and seminars to discuss the plan.

NGOs were actively involved throughout the process. NGOs gave

substantial input to the action plan that sets out specific, measurable, and timely goals. The action-plan also gives the NGOs responsibility and accountability. NGOs that run shelters and provide services to victims and have experience in the field are active players in the implementation of the activities.

Recently, the National Coordinator held the first meeting of the Anti-trafficking Task Force. The Task Force is a working group comprised of experts on specific areas related to anti-trafficking. Experts are representatives of government agencies, NGOs, and shelters. The working group will be responsible for the preparation of working plans. The working plan will be the agenda of activities that a specific institution will implement within a specific period of time; this agenda will have to be in accordance with the national action plan '08-'10. The members of the Task Force will continue to be responsible for submitting information and short reports on the actions their respective institution took with regard to anti-trafficking. The role of the Local Anti-trafficking Committees (LATC) will be of great importance in reassuring that the local institutions have all the necessary resources to perform their tasks at their best. The National Coordinator in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations has conducted and will continue to conduct training for the members of the LATCs. In December trainings were conducted with the Committee of Elbasan and during January trainings with the Committee of Lezha and Vlora. In the following months trainings will be conducted with the remaining Committees.

¶E. A spot featuring the message of the Anti-Trafficking National Coordinator on child sex tourism was broadcasted by the major TV networks in the country. The national toll free no. 0 800 1212 is open and running, and is continuously advertised. With the help of the OSCE and Council of Europe most border crossing points display signs and billboards showing anti-trafficking messages.

¶F. In 2007, the MoI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Tourism and OSCE "On the Promotion and Implementation of the Code of Conduct for prevention of the sexual exploitation of children in tourism." As a result, 24 operators of tourist agencies and hotels signed a cooperation agreement on the implementation of the Code. The Ministry of Tourism has initiated an inter-ministerial working group which will be responsible for monitoring the proper implementation of the Code of Conduct. The group will be comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Albanian Association of Tourism; the leading agency will be the Ministry of Tourism under the assistance of the OSCE Presence in Albania.

¶G. Not applicable per reftel instructions.

TIP Hero

Post nominates Mrs. Vera Lesko, founder and Executive Director of the Hearth of Vlora Women (Vatra) shelter. Mrs. Lesko was one of the first people in Albania to recognize the problem of trafficking in persons in 1996. Over the last 12 years she has risked danger to herself and her family to protect victims of trafficking and prevent young women from falling prey to this crime.

Vera Lesko is the founding director of The Hearth of Vlora Women (commonly referred to as "Vatra"), an organization based in southern Albania, that has pioneered anti-trafficking efforts in the country. The Hearth provides reintegration and protection services to returned victims of trafficking and also carries out awareness raising activities for at-risk communities in southern Albania.

Vera first became involved in the anti-trafficking movement in 1996, when she was asked to undertake research on the growing problem of trafficking in persons. She was shocked by the results which indicated that a large number of Albanian girls were being trafficked overseas for sexual exploitation, and many of them were being transported through Vlora to cross the Adriatic by speedboat into Italy. The illegal activities of the traffickers went on under the noses of corrupt officials in the Vlora district. In some instances there was evidence of official involvement in human trafficking. When she saw the depth of the problem created by the criminal activity in Vlora, Vera Lesko was determined to work

against the trafficking of girls and women into prostitution, despite the threats she and her family would have to face.

In 1997, Vera founded The Hearth of Vlora Women, an organization that has pioneered anti-trafficking efforts in Albania, and in 1999 they began offering prevention services through a social services center. In 2001, The Hearth opened the first shelter in the country for trafficked Albanian women and girls. The shelter provides secure accommodation and assistance to victims of trafficking. It also offers such rehabilitation and reintegration services as legal and medical counseling, educational and vocational training, assistance in accessing employment, and family mediation services for returned victims.

Vera has persevered with assisting victims of trafficking, despite numerous threats and beatings. Early on, she was stopped on the street and told that her daughter would be kidnapped and trafficked if Vera did not stop her work. Rather than giving in to the traffickers' demands, she sent her daughter to live with relatives in Italy, trading time spent with her child for the child's safety. She has been beaten several times, once just barely surviving. Over the years, the windows of her home have been broken, and she has received many threatening letters and phone calls. Since 2007, Vera has been battling breast cancer but has continued to direct the Hearth shelter. None of the obstacles she has faced have deterred her commitment to protect women and combat the trafficking of human beings.

Vera Lesko and The Hearth have advocated for many years for creating a solid system of assistance, support and protection measures for trafficking victims to ensure that they are able to find a way out of trafficking and given the opportunity to rebuild their lives in safety.

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WITHERS